

About Lichen Planus

Parkland Health & Hospital System Vulvology Clinic



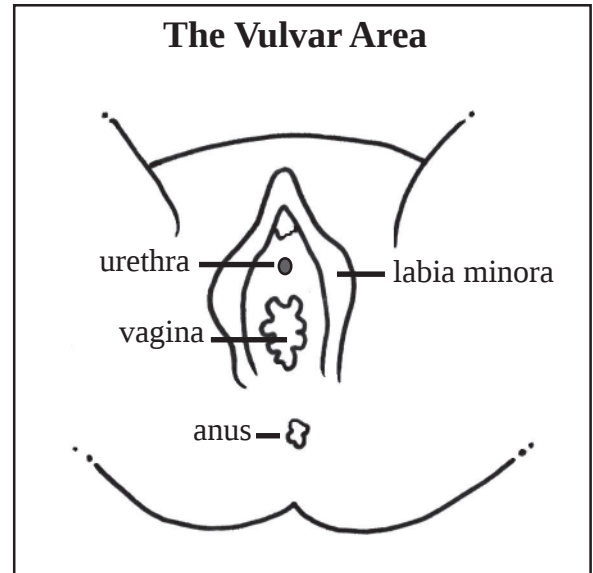
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What is lichen planus?

Lichen planus is a skin problem that causes redness, swelling and sores. Lichen planus can happen on any part of the body such as:

- The vulva and vagina.
- The gums and inside of the mouth (oral lichen planus).
- The skin of the arms, legs, chest, back and belly.

Lichen planus of the vulva and vagina happen more often in women between the ages of 12 - 45, but can happen at any age.



What causes lichen planus?

The exact cause of lichen planus is not known. It may be an **autoimmune** illness. An autoimmune illness is one where your body's antibodies (which it makes to fight off infection), attack your own skin, and cause damage.

Because it is an autoimmune illness, lichen planus is **not** passed from one person to another. This means it is **not** passed to a baby during birth, nor by touching or having sex with someone who has lichen planus.

Other family members may also have lichen planus.

How will I know if I have lichen planus?

- You may have more vaginal discharge than usual. The discharge may be sticky, heavy and yellow.
- The vulvar/vaginal area may be red, sore, raw and have a burning feeling.
- There may be pain and/or bleeding during sex.
- Scarring may cause the vagina to become too short, narrow or even closed up.

These symptoms will be different in each woman, and may be mild or very bad.

(over)

How will my doctor or healthcare provider check for lichen planus?

Your doctor or healthcare provider will look for skin changes that may be found with lichen planus. Vaginal discharge will also be checked. Sometimes, a biopsy or small sample of skin may be sent for testing.

How should lichen planus be treated?

Lichen planus often lasts a long time, but it can be controlled with treatment. You may be treated in any of the following ways.

1. **Vulvar skin care.** Keep the vulvar/vaginal area as clean and dry as possible. Follow the instructions on the Vulvar Skin Care handout.
2. **Steroid ointment or cream.** Put a thin layer of steroid ointment over the vulvar area. This will lessen redness, swelling, itching and burning. Use only as your doctor or healthcare provider tell you to. Using too much or too often can thin the skin and make the problem worse. Steroid creams are sometimes needed in the vagina.
3. **Vaginal dilator.** The dilator gently stretches the vagina to help keep it from becoming too short or too narrow or from closing up. Your doctor or healthcare provider will teach you how to use a vaginal dilator if you decide to use one.

Lichen planus of the mouth (oral)

About half of the women with vulvar/vaginal lichen planus may also have oral lichen planus. **Signs** of oral lichen planus are sores and small scars in the mouth or on the gums. Oral lichen planus is **treated** with steroid lozenges (medicine that is sucked, and melts in the mouth, like candy).